New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1956

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"Macbeth" "Auntie Mame"
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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Sleeping Prince"

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER
November 2, 1956

Redgrave, Bel Geddes Decorate Costume Fable, 'Sleeping Prince'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The second Terence Rattigan play within the fortnit, "The Sleeping Prince," came last evening to the Coronet Theatre and I bet it arrived in a coach-and-four. It is a pleasantly romantic marshmallow in which Barbara Bel Geddes wears the same white evening dress nearly all the time between the hours of 11:30 P.M. June 21, 1911, and 10 A.M. June 23, 1911, without getting a wrinkle in it. They just don't make clothes like that no more. But, in the same period, Michael Redgrave has more changes than Rosalind Russell; the only thing permanent in his appearance is his monocle.

Graustarkian is the only adjective for this comic-opera comedy, I guess, much as I wish there were a newer one; but, since "The Sleeping Prince" is absolutely honorable in its intentions toward its audience, and is charmingly played by a cast which includes the marvelous Cathleen Nesbitt, it is entertaining if you'd like an easy journey into the world of make-believe. Backward, turn backward, O Time in thy flight, and make us all boys and girls again just for tonight.

Royal Command

The magnificent Redgrave is Prince Regent of the Kingdom of Carpathia, and he has come to London for the coronation of George Five. He has commissioned Rex O'Malley, a British Foreign Office man, to fetch him a show girl to partake of caviar, champagne and consequences.

So in comes this girl, Miss Bel Geddes. She takes a wide-eyed look around this magnificent plush horror which Norris Houghton has designed and she exclaims "Gosh!" By this one knows almost immediately that here is an American girl. (From Milwaukee, she tells us later). This place is supposed to be the royal suite of the Carpathain Legation in London, but for all I know it may really be a replica of the town house of Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Miller.

Attractive Company

Not quite before you know it, this girl has wrapped this imperious Prince Regent around her pinky and is settling international troubles. And she isn't bald like Adlai Stevenson, either; she has blonde ringlets trickling down her neck and she tosses them with the accuracy of a St. Petersburg horseshoe pitcher.

It's all in fun, as Robert W. Chambers told his readers before Rattigan was born. There could be no more attractive comedians than Miss Bel Geddes and Redgrave, and Miss Nesbitt has a jolly time in the role of a royal old relic. Other contributors to this self-confessed fable are Johnny Stewart, Nydia Westman, Margaret Neff Jerome and a funny girl named Elwin Stock.

"THE SLEEPING PRINCE"

Play by Terence Rattigan; staged by Michael Redgrave; setting by Norris Houghton; costumes by Alvin Colt; presented by the Producers Theatre and Gilbert Miller at the Coronet Theatre, November 1, 1956. The cast:

The Major Domo..Ronald Dawson
The First Footman..William Major
The 2nd Footman..Martin Waldron
Northbrook.....Rex O'Malley
Mary.....Barbara Bel Geddes
The Butler.....Sorrell Booke
The Regent...Michael Redgrave
The King.....Johnny Stewart
The Grand Duchess.....
Cathleen Nesbitt
The Countess...Nydia Westman
The Baroness....Betty Sinclair
The Archduchess.....
Margaret Neff Jerome
The Princess.....Elwin Stock

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune
November 2, 1956

THEATER

'The Sleeping Prince'

By WALTER KERR

MICHAEL REDGRAVE wears a monocle throughout the full five scenes of "The Sleeping Prince," and it may account for an odd little habit he's developed of checking everything he does most carefully before he does it. He goes to sit on the arm of a sofa in gay abandon and stops to make certain the arm is still there. He sweeps Barbara Bel Geddes into his passionate embrace and, lowering his eyes until they are level with hers, checks to make sure that her lips are where they ought to be. I wish to heaven he'd check the script.

• • •

There is something terribly wrong here. Terence Rattigan, who was delighting us only last week with his "Separate Tables," has now come up with what he calls 'an occasional fairy tale,' and while I don't wish to pose as an authority on fairy tales I seem to remember E. M. Forster describing the genre as a series of marvelous happenings so progressively stimulating that the audience is constantly and breathlessly asking "And then—?" Last night, after each passing marvel, one could only ask "And so?"

• • •

Marvels there were. The first of them would seem to be author Rattigan's conceit that a fairy tale can be improved by turning the handsome Prince into an intolerable stick and keeping him that way until just before dawn. Actor Redgrave, it must be said, sees his author through to the bitter end. As a smug Carpathian Regent who is a tyrant to his son, a dictator to his people, and an exceedingly clumsy lover to a chorus girl he has picked up for the night, Mr. Redgrave turns himself into a forbiding automaton with a high, nervous giggle, a scratchy grunt for more disturbing occasions, and an Erich Von Stroheim curled-lip accent that does nothing at all for the comic malapropisms ("she is a little American ninnycompoop") and the garbled Shakesperean quotes Mr. Rattigan has given him. It is an elaborate and mechanical performance that is almost entirely without charm; coming from a man who has made several notable contributions to the gayety and stature of the Broadway stage in the past season, it is as thoroughly mystifying as anything in the Brothers Grimm.

• • •

Mr. Redgrave has directed himself, the winsome Barbara Bel Geddes, and the ever-glorious Cathleen Nesbitt in this curious enterprise, and it may be that this double-duty has brought about the remote, impersonal and echoing hollowness that booms like the fall of Kings from the Coronet stage.

Certainly Barbara Bel Geddes, an enchantress if ever there was one, is deprived of her magic potions in scene after scene. Miss Bel Geddes looks lovely in her white Valentina gown, licks a caviar spoon with the hoyden delicacy she has trademarked as her own, and brings off very nicely an impossible demand that she fill a dead stage from scratch by going into a solo chorus routine from a hypothetical musical-comedy of 1911. But even when she is unpredictably laughing right into a man's kiss, she cannot conceal the fact that there is no real part here—no real character—on which to lavish her incidental drolleries.

Cathleen Nesbitt, a Niagara of jewelry as a Grand Duchess who hears only half of what is said to her (I'm afraid she misses very little), does give a nice lift to a passage describing an amateur performance of "King Lear," and Johnny Stewart is manly and unruffled as a young King who can still be bribed with the promise of a bulldog. Norris Houghton's single setting, a red and gold jungle of candelabra-bearing cupids, is suitably and even amusingly rococo.

• • •

But it's all over, I'm afraid, from the time when — toward the end of the first scene—Miss Bel Geddes teases her would-be seducer by archly inquiring what will happen if she takes "one more step." Author Rattigan has the lass get to her feet at this point, take one step, and pass out cold. This, I should explain, is a pun; and it sets the tone for everything that follows.

In all that follows, alas, "The Sleeping Prince" is never awakened. It is simply allowed to lie there.

The New York Times
November 2, 1956

Theatre: Rattigan's 'Sleeping Prince'

Redgrave and Miss Bel Geddes Star

Rattigan Play Has Debut at Coronet

By BROOKS ATKINSON

HAVING contributed "Separate Tables" to our season, Terence Rattigan has done his bit.

His second play for the year, "The Sleeping Prince," which opened at the Coronet last evening, is the indulgence he is entitled to ask for having done a good deed. "An Occasional Fairy Tale," he dubs it. May we hope that "occasional" is the key word here? For this little prance back through the years to Graustark is quite a long ride. Neither the views nor the conversation along the route is enlivening.

•

On the stage, of course, the scenery is spectacular. It represents the royal suite of the Carpathian Legation in London, lavishly designed by Norris Houghton, who on weekdays co-directs the Phoenix Theatre. Alvin Colt, who frequently designs costumes on a Spartan budget at the Phoenix, has dressed "The Sleeping Prince" with more gold braid than you can find in the United States Customs service. And Valentina, the golden damosel of the couturières, has designed a ravishing evening gown for Barbara Bel Geddes. Nothing money can buy has been denied this insipid parlor charade.

Among its luxuries the actors take first rank. Michael Redgrave, a classical actor of illustrious mien, squanders his talents on the part of an amorous Regent of Carpathia. "Squanders" is the right word here. For Mr. Redgrave has built the part up with an infinite attention to subtle and amusing details. Since Mr. Redgrave gave us a memorable performance in "Tiger at the Gates" last season, he, too, is entitled to his wild oat. But the waste of talent is not only conspicuous but prodigious.

Miss Bel Geddes, who looks as appetizing as a vanilla cream puff, pours all her luminous charm, as well as her skill and sincerity, into the part of an American Cinderella. Cathleen Nesbitt, an honored lady of the stage, plays the silly part of the Grand Duchess with elegance and opulence.

Among the others who have the privilege of partaking of Mr. Rattigan's fictional grandeur are Rex O'Malley, who is nervously amusing as a Britisher with gold braid and a sword; Johnny Stewart, now advanced from the Crown Prince of Siam to King of Carpathia, who has adjusted his American accent to Europe, and Lydia Westman, who plays a lady-in-waiting with a crumpled humor that makes all of us homesick for "The Madwoman of Chaillot."

•

It is possible that Mr. Rattigan's tour of Carpathia is misinterpreted on the stage. Although Mr. Redgrave's direction is meticulous and inventive, it may be too deliberate. If "The Sleeping Prince" were played with ironic gaiety, it might be entertaining.

But in terms of the ornate, realistic performance now on the stage of the Coronet it is tiresome. It is the story of an American actress—naive, of course—who gets drawn into the family life of the royal house of Carpathia during a coronation in London. She refreshes them with her sunny common sense. What they have needed all along is the common touch.

Mr. Rattigan can stand on "Separate Tables" this season. That's good enough for any man.

Journal American
November 2, 1956

Brilliant Cast In Noble Effort To Save Play

By JOHN McCLAIN

A HANDSOME PRODUCTION and the combined efforts of a brilliant cast are not enough, in this reviewer's opinion, to make a very exciting evening of Terence Rattigan's "The Sleeping Prince," which opened at the Coronet Theatre last night. It is a woefully slow starter, to begin with, and even when the gears mesh and the wheels start turning it doesn't take us on a particularly emotional excursion.

Many times in the past we have been treated to the tribulations of the Prince of Graustark, momentarily plucked from his world of pomp and politics by the love of a simple maiden. Here Mr. Rattigan has added little to the familiar tale.

The hero is the Prince Regent of Carpathia; his heroine is an American chorine he meets while attending the Coronation of King George V, in London, in 1911. There is the background of middle-European intrigue, the poor little rich-boy King who will soon ascend the throne, the vacuous Grand Duchess (wife to the Regent), and assorted members of the suite and servants.

Too Much Dignity

An effort is made to interest us in a political plot involving various ententes prior to World War I, and it comes as almost no surprise when the American girl sees clearly through the whole sorry mess and settles matters in her own primeval manner. Carpathia, the mythical kingdom, is aligned on the side of right, the Regent emerges as a diplomat of stature, and everybody lives happily evermore.

As the hero there has never been a more devastating or elaborately-costumed Prince Regent than Michael Redgrave. He speaks with a strange accent, part Swedish, part German, with overtones of Alfred Lunt, and I thought he was inordinately miscast. Just too much dignity, I guess it's as simple as that.

As the little American doll, Barbara Bel Geddes gives a warm and assured performance, but she was constantly struggling to bring some plausibility to a part which never quite rings true. Her motives are shaded, it never seemed clear exactly why she became so intimately embroiled in the royal mish-mash.

High Hilarity

Apart from these complaints there are many moments of high hilarity. There is a delightful scene between Cathleen Nesbitt and Miss Bel Geddes, a bit having almost no bearing on the plot which is nevertheless priceless. There's another scene, again extraneous, between Johnny Stewart (the King) and Elwin Stock (the Princess), which humorously disposes of the custom of planned marriages in European court circles. And there is a consistently amusing contribution by Rex O'Malley, as the unhappy British diplomat attached to the Grand Duke's suite.

"The Sleeping Prince" has a distinguished record across the ocean; it served Sir Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh for a profitable season, and it is now being made into a motion picture with Sir Laurence and Marilyn Monroe. The sad fact seems to be that it doesn't travel well.

New York Post

November 2, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Terence Rattigan in a Minor Mood

Never depend on anything in the theater! It was only a week ago that Terence Rattigan's "Separate Tables" came to town and showed how brilliant England's foremost contemporary playwright could be. Last night Mr. Rattigan's "The Sleeping Prince," which was a big success in London, opened at the Coronet, and, while I wouldn't go so far as to say it was a disaster, it turned out, I thought, to be as disappointing as "Separate Tables" was a delight. Despite such admirable players as Michael Redgrave and Barbara Bel Geddes, it proved amazingly lacking in any trace of distinction.

To keep to my contention about the theater's unaccountability, consider Mr. Redgrave's portrayal of the title role. In "Tiger at the Gates" last season, the distinguished British star demonstrated what a really magnificent actor he can be. But in "The Sleeping Prince," while his technical virtuosity was again evident and he played the part of a stuffy but attractive Balkan princeling with a resourceful knowledge of all the details that go to make up a skillfully detailed characterization, there was a curious lack of humor in almost everything that he did.

Romantic Fable

Mr. Rattigan describes his play as "An Occasional Fairy Tale," and I gather that his plan was to take the familiar romantic fable of the handsome prince and the Cinderella-like beauty and transform it into a sophisticated combination of sentiment, satire, ironic observation, cynicism and straightforward but adult romanticism. It's a fine trick if it can be brought off, and there are few things more entertaining in the theater than a good, sophisticated fairy tale, but, unfortunately, none of its elements seemed to work out with the proper show of dramatic effectiveness.

It is important, for one thing, that such a narrative should have a credibility all its own, and it is a chief failing of "The Sleeping Prince" that it misses almost completely in this respect. The Balkan aristocrat invites the naive American chorus girl to his palatial suite in London for the purpose of seduction, finds she interests him in a way he hadn't guessed, and is aroused from his pompous stupor by her charm, and this should be fine for an urbanely satirical romance. But, somehow, I could never believe that the two people were really interested in each other.

Cathleen Nesbitt

Since Mr. Rattigan is an expert theatrical craftsman, even in his less successful flights, there are engaging and amusing moments in "The Sleeping Prince." These usually take place when Cathleen Nesbitt is on the stage, for Miss Nesbitt plays the prince's vague, gushing, distracted and good-natured consort with the style, humor and unostentatiously aristocratic bearing that we have come to expect from this fine actress. The play also goes in for occasional traces of political satire, but it is no more successful here than it is in its central romantic narrative.

While Mr. Redgrave is capturing the surface aspects of his role without bringing forth its underlying humor, Miss Bel Geddes is playing the American chorus girl in her best "Moon Is Blue" manner. It is a very charming manner, too, but it doesn't seem to fit into the half-satirical, half-romantic mood of Mr. Rattigan with quite the proper effectiveness. Johnny Stewart is excellent as the prince's nice son, the nominal ruler of the Balkan state, and Rex O'Malley, who is getting to look like Cole Porter, is helpful as a Foreign Office man. It's too bad about "The Sleeping Prince."

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 2, 1956

Comic Spirit Nods and Dozes

By TOM DONNELLY.

I sat before Terence Rattigan's "The Sleeping Prince" (at the Coronet) last night in an attitude of respectful attention, admiring the intelligence and taste of almost everything I saw done on the stage.

Unhappily, "The Sleeping Prince" should have sent waltzes running through my head, it should have put me in a champagne glow, it should have sent me plunging into the night with a giddy cry of "I don't care if it is a fragile little affair, there is room in our universe for charming baubles!"

I tried mightily to achieve this mood, but the best I could do was to reflect mournfully that it's too bad to have to see a bauble burst.

The Stage Is Set.

The scene of "The Sleeping Prince" is the royal suite of the Carpathian Legation in London. The time is June, 1911. The principal characters are the Grand Duke Charles, Prince Regent of Carpathia, and Mary Morgan, an American chorus girl currently appearing in a work called "The Coconut Girl."

Given two such central figures, the main business of the evening could scarcely be a matter of even momentary doubt. Seduction and protocol are Topics A and B.

As the regent, Michael Redgrave is an imposing personage, with a fleeting Germanic accent, a Hapsburg lip and a full assortment of dashing uniforms and royal purple dressing gowns. As the sort of chorus girl a man wouldn't hesitate to take home to mother, Barbara Bel Geddes is delicious. That's the word. Delicious.

Sly Sallies.

When the lady says, "Mud in your eye!" the regent snorts into his champagne, upsets the golden fluid all over his gorgeous raiment, whinnies appreciatively, and says that he certainly must remember that one.

Nostrils flaring, eyes hot, he creeps up on the exquisite little baggage, and gets hopelessly tangled in the gilded furniture. The lady says that the regent is just about the cutest aristocrat she's ever seen or dreamed of, she laughs heartily at his sinister sexual maneuvers, and the regent withdraws, wounded to the purple core that the techniques which have reduced so many other females to voluptuous submission have aroused this Yankee nobody to unseemly mirth.

Redgrave's Role.

Now Mr. Redgrave has figured out a hundred very funny things to do in the course of this amorous duel. He executes each and every one of them with admirable competence. And the effect is of a hundred executions.

Mr. Redgrave never seems comfortable in his role, and this feeling of unease is communicated to the spectator. Mr. Redgrave directed the production, and he has worked out for himself a dazzling performance. On paper.

Miss Bel Geddes is as fresh and charming a creature as one could hope to see, but her basic style is a kind of lovable realism, and her current vehicle calls for something higher and more extravagant in tone, and a lot less literal.

Cathleen Nesbitt, as the grand duchess, knows precisely what is required, and delivers it, in royal spades. Whenever Miss Nesbitt sets foot upon the stage we get a glimpse of what "The Sleeping Prince" might have been.

The materials are tissue-thin, but worn with a sufficient air they can almost pass for ermine.

Bows Distributed.

The physical production is sensationally opulent (Alvin Colt's costumes in particular), and all of the supporting roles are excellently played, with special nods going to Johnny Stewart as a boy king, to Rex O'Malley as a gentleman-in-waiting, to Nydia Westman as a countess with a terrible cold in her nose, and to a juvenile actress named Elwin Stock as a midget princess with a monumentally disagreeable demeanor.

Daily Mirror

November 2, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Sleeping Prince' Is A Cure for Insomnia

• Whatever spark it has, talented actress Cathleen Nesbitt gives it.

Terence Rattigan's "The Sleeping Prince" awoke in fits and starts Thursday evening at the Coronet Theatre. Frankly, His Royal Highness should have stood in bed, as our pal Dan Parker puts it. And so should we. For it's more comfortable fighting Morpheus on an ostermoor.

The Producers Theatre is noted for intelligence, and Gilbert Miller for taste. Yet these worthies teamed to perpetrate this prank on a bunch of unsuspecting unfortunates. It was Halloween the night before, and we aren't due for turkey until Thanksgiving.

• • •

YOU REALLY have to see "The Sleeping Prince" to believe it. It plays like a vintage operetta, sans schmaltzy music. In fact, we thought that the ghost of a Viennese waltz king, circa the turn of the century, would pop into an orchestra pit any minute and start batoneering in three-quarter time.

It seems there was a little American chorus cutie appearing in London. She caught the eye of a dullard prince and snapped him right out of his shut-eye blues. By the curtain's final fall she was planning to meet him at a hideaway in Carpathia. Well, that'll give you a rough idea.

Norris Houghton has designed a handsome setting—the royal suite in the Carpathian Legation in London. It must have cost the Producers Theatre and Miller a royal sum. They should have saved it until a good script came along to fill its sumptuous spaces.

• • •

MICHAEL REDGRAVE directed, and co-starred, in this tepid travesty on mythical kingdoms. He acted like a sleep-walker, dreaming of his triumph in Jean Giraudoux's "Tiger at the Gates." Attractive Barbara Bel Geddes, the merry-merry maid, must have been recalling the bravas she received in "The Moon Is Blue" and "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof."

Cathleen Nesbitt, a truly superior actress, probably was wondering why she ever deserted a career in "My Fair Lady" for this temporary caper. What spark it had, she gave it. Johnny Stewart, a top-fligth juvenile, and Rex O'Malley, a 24-carat comedian, were others trapped in this fumbling fiasco.

If "The Sleeping Prince" is still tenanting the Coronet by the time you read this salute, you might try it as an antidote for insomnia. You don't need a doctor's prescription for this rock-a-bye baby.

"Auntie Mame"

The New York Times

November 1, 1956

Theatre: Roz Russell

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE neither party nominated Rosalind Russell for President, she has naturally reverted to the theatre. She is a good girl to have around in a crisis, which would have been a good thing for the country.

But it is also a good thing for "Auntie Mame," in which she appeared at the Broadhurst last evening. "Auntie Mame" would be a major crisis without her. Using Patrick Dennis' novel as their source-book, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee have knocked together a ramshackle play out of it. And Morton Da Costa has directed it in the cartoon style of the last act of "No Time for Sergeants."

•

To say that it would not amount to much without Roz Russell would be beside the point. For Roz Russell is in it up to her neck and she is wonderful. She is pretending to play the part of a highly disorganized Beekman Place châtelaine who inherits an orphan nephew in 1928 and fantasticates his life until 1946, when she starts fantasticating the life of her grandnephew.

At the final curtain it appears that the same kind of lunacy is going to continue indefinitely.

As long as Miss Russell emits sparks in the center of it, no one is going to object very strenuously. For she is a special kind of comedienne. She is not the only one who can give a line a malicious inflection or radiate sardonicism by looking blank. But she is the only one who is also good-hearted and makes a point of getting along amiably with the human race. "You're odd, but loving," a loyal house servant says to Auntie Mame when everything looks particularly disastrous. That's it. No matter how outrageous Miss Russell's behavior may be, she is fundamentally a good egg.

•

The comedy involves her in a number of follies—scatter-brained parties with irresponsible friends, two or three disastrous attempts to earn a living in the marts of trade, visits to the South and in vacation spots around the world, a brush with correct people who live in a restricted community in Connecticut and a victorious re-assembly with her old friends in the last act.

Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Lee are the authors of "Inherit the Wind," which is largely to their credit. But they are also the librettists for "Shangri-la," which was more like Purgatory last season. Their version of "Auntie Mame" suggests that although they are craftsmen they are not writers. They have pasted this skit together but they have not been able to develop a narrative coherently. Even by popular standards this is a pretty shabby job.

The cast is about as long as the telephone directory, and has the actors doubling so fast that they meet themselves coming and going through the scenery. Some of them are pretty funny, too. Polly Rowles as a raffish lady of the stage, and Peggy Cass as a messy secretary who adds pregnancy to her disorders are cheerful company. So is young Jan Handzlik as the orphan nephew.

•

But "Auntie Mame" is Miss Russell's private antic. Tall, slender, willowy, inexhaustible, incredibly fast with a joke, incredibly versatile in her changes of pace, she is consistently uproarious. She also has the final gift of a comedienne: she can be touching at times. In the midst of a comic explosion, she can show that she is aware of other people, and can shift the focus from herself to someone else.

"AUNTIE MAME"

Comedy by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, based on Patrick Dennis' novel; staged by Morton DaCosta; production designed by Oliver Smith; lighting by Peggy Clark; costumes by Noel Taylor; presented by Robert Fryer and Lawrence Carr at the Broadhurst Theatre, October 31, 1956. The cast:

Norah Muldoon...Beulah Garrick
Patrick Dennis.....Jan Handzlik
Ito.....Yuki Shimoda
Vera Charles.....Polly Rowles
Raymond.....Cris Alexander
Ralph Devine.....Grant Sullivan
M. Lindsay Woolsey..John O'Hare
Auntie Mame....Rosalind Russell
Mr. Babcock.....Robert Allen
Beauregard Jackson Pickett Burnside.....Robert Smith
Cousin Fan.....Nan McFarland
Sally Cato MacDougal.....Marian Winters
Mother Burnside....Ethel Cody
Dr. Shurr.....Geoffrey Bryant
Patrick Dennis...Robert Higgins
Agnes Gooch.....Peggy Cass
Brian O'Bannion...James Monks
Gloria Upson.....Joyce Lear
Doris Upson...Dorothy Blackburn
Claude Upson.....Walter Klavun
Pegeen Ryan.....Patricia Jenkins

Pity she is not going to be President after all. But she is triumphantly entertaining in "Auntie Mame," which is a good thing for the country.

DAILY NEWS

November 1, 1956

The Wonderful Rosalind Russell Is a Blessing to 'Auntie Mame'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Only once before now have we theatregoers had the privilege of seeing Rosalind Russell on a stage. This was in the excellent musical, "Wonderful Town." Last evening, at the Broadhurst Theatre, Miss Russell returned in a comedy, "Auntie Mame," and this shining event made me reasonably happy. I would have been happy, indeed, if Miss Russell had returned in a revival of "The Best House in Naples," for she is a fabulously skillful and completely adorable comedienne.

The play itself is an unstuck montage — an adaptation by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee of a novel by Patrick Dennis (a pseudonym) about an ageless nymph who raises a nephew from childhood to fatherhood without growing up one bit herself.

Many Smart Costumes.

A playgoer might as well forget about continuity when he goes to the Broadhurst and concentrate upon Miss Russell as she slithers into a dozen or more changes of clothing and adjusts herself to such varying locales as Sutton Place, the deep, deep South and the hidebound suburbs of New York. The bringing-up of her nephew is the least important part of the play and therefore the play's greatest structural defect.

There are funny lines and naughty lines, and under Morton Da Costa's direction "Auntie Mame" maintains an air of smart gaiety. Miss Russell has a supporting cast practically as large as the company of "Tamburlaine the Great," and among these players are some good ones, like Polly Rowles in the role of a beat-down actress and Peggy Cass as a pregnant secretary.

The One Big Reason

For me, though, Miss Russell is the whole comedy, and she could play it without any clothes. I don't mean she should run around nekkid, for she is not that kind of girl. She is a lady. She is, I think, the best player of light, smart comedy since Ina Claire came of age.

There is much glitter in the production of "Auntie Mame"—the direction, the delightful sets by Oliver Smith, the many sophisticated jokes and the handsome big company. But the only reason for seeing the comedy is Rosalind Russell.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 1, 1956

Masterpiece of Rozzle-Dazzle

By TOM DONNELLY.

As "Auntie Mame" (at the Broadhurst), Rosalind Russell goes roaring down the track like a sequin-strewn express train. The lady is spectacularly funny in this new play by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee.

Play? What am I saying? "Auntie Mame" is a kind of nonmusical revue, a string of gags, sketches, blackouts, and odds and ends, some of them dusty and frayed, a lot of them as bright and brisk as a forest fire under glass. (Ah, the similes are out of control tonight, I tell you!)

Mother love we've had. "Auntie Mame" is, among other things, a chronicle history of a woman's lifetime of devotion to a nephew. Auntly love may get to be all the rage, and it could easily open a new and profitable horizon to the psychiatrists.

Giddy Party.

As the evening buzzes along, Miss Russell gets to do everything but hang from the chandelier in her negligee.

When we first encounter her, Auntie Mame is presiding over a giddy party in her Beekman Pl. apartment. Time: The '20s. "Don't catch cold," she says to a departing Raymond Duncan, bare of toe and flowing of hair in his sandals and his white robes. She invites her nephew, who has just been placed in her dubious custody, to write down all the words he has heard employed at the party, and hasn't understood. The child obliges with a list of sexual aberrations. "You won't need some of those words for months and months," Auntie Mame says, putting away the list with an easy flourish.

The depression strikes, and Auntie Mame goes bravely forth to earn the family bread and caviar. She has a brief fling as a telephone operator, and gets so tangled in the wires as to suggest a low comedy Medusa with her snakes hopelessly out of control. She tries acting, at the invitation of a theatrical friend of hers, and sallies forth upon the stage encumbered by so much clanking jewelry that she not only drowns out her own three lines, but her friend's big scene in its entirety.

Various Views.

The years go by, bringing us glimpses of Auntie Mame clerking at Macy's; Auntie Mame way down South on a Georgia plantation, where she clinches her hold on a millionaire; Auntie Mame losing her mate when he falls off the Matterhorn; Auntie Mame in mourning; Auntie Mame writing her autobiography; Auntie Mame in toreador pants, in gowns cut down to there, in housecoats snarling with embroidered dragons; Auntie Mame with black hair, blond hair, beige hair, blue hair; Auntie Mame boiled, fried, fricasseed, and on toast.

Miss Russell makes her triumphant progress through a carload of trick scenery with awesome sure-footedness. She handles props with the skill of an inspired juggler, she employs her body with an angular awareness of all the hilarious possibilities, and she runs through a gamut of cartoon emotions with fabulous energy and glittering precision. She is again, in short, the superb clown of "Wonderful Town."

"Auntie Mame" is a laughing matter, all right, if you meet it on its own crude, inconsequential terms. There are drawbacks, of varying size. The sentimental passages are inclined to be distressing. The lengthy Down South sequence, which has Miss Russell goaded into attempting her first fox hunt by a conniving local belle, is constructed of materials that even Milton Berle might recognize as mildewed.

Nephew Rescued.

At the very end, Auntie Mame rescues her now adult nephew from an anti-Semitic Connecticut debutante and her insufferable parents. This sudden intrusion of a real, and grave, social issue in a noisy vaudeville seems to me in questionable taste.

Two members of Miss Russell's vast supporting company hold their own with the star and the scenery. Polly Rowles is gorgeously droll as the heroine's actress friend, and Peggy Cass is fine and dandy as a mousy secretary who finds herself facing the indignities of unwed motherhood.

Morton DaCosta's direction is a triumph of engineering, and so is Oliver Smith's production scheme. Oh yes, a best-selling novel by Patrick Dennis set this mammoth project in motion.

Daily Mirror

November 1, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Auntie Mame' Is A Surefire Winner

• Rosalind Russell turns in sparkling performance of title role.

With Rosalind Russell up, "Auntie Mame" breezed home a winner at the Broadhurst Wednesday evening. It was like watching Earle Sande hit the tape on Man O' War. Thoroughbreds all, if we ever saw 'em. And what an entertainment pay-off for the lucky ticket-holders.

Roz was driving all the way. What a grand and glorious ride she gave the Jerome Lawrence-Robert E. Lee comedy champ. Using a laugh here and a heartthrob there, she turned in one of the most terrific performances glimpsed on the Main Stem track in many a season.

LAWRENCE AND LEE have fashioned a thunderbolt of fun from the Patrick Dennis best-seller. It's about a wealthy playgirl of the 20's, who suddenly finds herself guardian to a small nephew. As the kid's nurse puts it, she's an odd but lovin' woman.

Her parties are as weird as an Isadora Duncan dance, and her friends as eccentric as a Salvador Dali painting. But she opens new vistas for the ward. He learns to mix a Martini such as Alexander Woollcott liked, before he masters the three R's. But he turns out all right in the end, thanks to the cock-eyed wisdom of his Auntie Mame.

The new arrival is one of the most costly straight plays on record. It has a raft of stunning sets by Oliver Smith, and a fashion show to dazzle the ladies, by Noel Taylor and Travis Banton. The femmes out front were ooh-ing and ah-ing every time Roz stepped on stage in another spectacular Banton creation.

Morton DaCosta's direction is fast as a lightning flash. He hasn't let the episodic script, which dashes over most of the globe—from Beekman Place to the Matterhorn, from a Georgia plantation to the Egyptian Pyramids—lag for so much as a split second. It's a gem of pacing, though beautifully detailed.

ROZ IS HILARIOUS as an avant garde hostess, a victim of the stock-market crash, a bewildered salesgirl at Macy's, an over-wrought switchboard operator, a reluctant equestrienne, a dubious mountain climber, a gal who tells all in her memoirs and the diabolically clever wrecker of an impossible romance. Everything she touches glitters like gold. Twenty-four carat gold.

Polly Rowles is wonderfully sassy as an acid-tongued actress with a yen for the bottle.

But it's Roz Russell who dominates "Auntie Mame," just as the Empire State Building does the New York skyline. Her perfect sense of timing, satiric bite and genuine warmth are marvels of showmanship.

The out-of-town handicappers were on the button this time. They predicted the winner's circle for "Auntie Mame." But this was no long shot. With Roz in the saddle, it was a shoo-in. A triumph for a great star and a pair of producers—Robert Fryer and Lawrence Carr—who gambled a fortune in the happiness sweepstakes. And won, hands down.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

November 1, 1956

THEATER

'Auntie Mame'

By WALTER KERR

I DON'T know how many kids got out for their tricking and treating in the pouring rain this All Hallow's Eve, but the big kid on the stage of the Broadhurst was having herself a whale of a time. "Auntie Mame," the jumping joyride that has been fashioned from Patrick Dennis' best seller, is a bit of a trick, all right: it's really a series of mildly related revue sketches that don't even need blackouts because they keep washing into one another. But Miss Rosalind Russell, throwing open her arms and spinning her head and blinding the customers with her very white teeth, turned it all into a tremendous treat. At least, I came away with a grin as big as a pumpkin's.

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One of the last things Miss Russell does in this brassy carnival of a show is to serve her dunderhead dinner guests a concoction that is really her own —flaming cocktails that singe the eyebrows, cancel insurance policies, and must be drunk rapidly before the alcoholic content burns away. Miss Russell herself must be taken rapidly, or you'll miss her: look away for a second and you won't see that bracelet glitter ferociously, that lower lip sag just enough to turn a fairish line into a firecracker, that disheveled Macy's sales-slip tumble like a shattered cabbage from her bewildered hands. We haven't been bothered much by hurricanes this year. They were afraid of the competition.

And the whole nation of insurance policies becomes unthinkable as Miss Russell teeters on the Matterhorn, plants a foot on the pyramids, and fights off an Irish poet, a southern belle with an accent as mean as her mind, a bank executive, and most of the remaining population of a high-clas jungle known as Beekman Place. (Producers Fryer and Carr have hired some forty Equity members to keep out of the star's way, and I have not even tried to count the unreeling cartoons that designer Oliver Smith keeps whisking in and out of the wings as stylish backgrounds).

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As most book-buyers seem to know by now, "Auntie Mame" details the free ride on an unanchored merry-go-round that a small boy gets when he is deeded over, on his father's untimely death in an athletic club, to a woman who is equally interested in Lithuanian bishops, disciples of Raymond Duncan, and enceinte but unmarried secretaries. Adapters Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee seem to have flipped over Mr. Dennis' flamboyant pages faithfully and rapidly, stuck a lot of them together with glue and then yelled for the stagehands to hurry up when the glue ran out, and they have by no means been above lines like "The way I look all I could play is understudy to a witch in 'Macbeth'" or a flippant "Nuts" when a convenient bowl of nuts is passed. They were, in short, counting on a lady whose name has now appeared often enough in this review; I feel confident that everything they were counting on has been handsomely hatched.

The star has some associates in sorcery, a couple of splendid ones. Polly Rowles, as an actress chum who's missed the last half of every drinking party she's ever been to, is resoundingly funny as she drops a sour "Pity!" into a gruesome conversation or wrestles with the demon Mame during an onstage uproar. Jan Handzlik is accomplished and appealing as the younger nephew, Robert Higgins agreeable as the mature one, and Marian Winters, Beulah Garrick, Yuki Shimoda, Robert Smith and John O'Hare are all fine as assorted victims.

The big second-running of the evening, though, is done by a bland, glazed, red-haired girl named Peggy Cass. Miss Cass droops on, a sweatered and bespectacled zombie, to serve as a speed-writing demon who can't be turned off, and as she sits typing Auntie Mame's memoirs in silent, ghoulish, cavernous laughter, or as she lowers her notoriously pregnant form onto a piece of modern Dutch furniture, she is hilarious.

"Auntie Mame" is a sketch-book; its jottings are random and its outlines are not always filled in. But with Russell peering out at you from every page, it's a happy and handsome gift for the holidays.

New York Post

November 1, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Triumph of Rosalind Russell

Toots Shor, the eminent restaurateur, is supposed to have said at a performance of "Hamlet" that he was the only person in the audience who didn't know how the show turned out. I felt rather in the position of Mr. Shor last night at the Broadhurst Theater, where "Auntie Mame" was having its premiere, because I seemed alone in never having read Patrick Dennis' novel upon which the comedy is based or come across a book review of it or even heard who Auntie Mame was. From that rather virginal position, I thought the play was fun and Rosalind Russell was terrific.

Indeed, with all proper respect for Mr. Dennis and for Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, who made the dramatization, it seemed to me that the mainstays of the evening were Miss Russell, the star, and Morton DaCosta, the director, with an additional bow rated by Oliver Smith, who designed the handsome and imaginative settings. There hasn't been such a bravura comic portrait in a long time as Miss Russell offers in the title role, while Mr. DaCosta has given the production a pace, imagination and sense of continuous visual humor that are delightful.

Lady's Adventures

Being less ignorant than I am about the Dennis best-seller, you probably know that Auntie Mame was a handsome, sparkling, scatterbrained and warm-hearted lady who brightened the American landscape from 1928 to the immediate past by her whimsical gaiety, her slightly madcap adventures and her devotion to her young nephew, who grew up to be Patrick Dennis. Through fortunes that rose and fell and a pleasant but brief marriage to a likable Southerner, who had the bad luck to tumble down from the Matterhorn, Auntie Mame's chief concern was that nephew, whom she raised.

All that the play really is, as it turns out, is a series of episodes dealing with the lady's adventures in New York, the South and on that unfortunate trip to Switzerland. You see her entertaining the literary celebrities of the period, managing to become an accidental heroine on a fox hunt, nonchalantly accompanying her husband on that fatal trip, failing epically as an actress and a saleslady, keeping the nephew from marrying the nitwit daughter of a stuffy family, and, at the end, starting to take the nephew's son on an expedition to India.

Heroic Portrait

"Auntie Mame" actually isn't very much of a play. It doesn't really try to be anything save a brightly superficial and shrewdly fabricated theatrical concoction replete with gags. What counts is that its central figure is a woman of spirit, innate kindness and undefeatable courage, and that Miss Russell captures all of her endearing qualities in a portrait that is both hilarious and lovable. It is important that Mame isn't just a funny woman. She's a darling, too, and the actress gives her heroic stature in a performance of quite stunning brilliance.

The production is handsome and elaborate, and Mr. DaCosta has staged it with superb pace, ingenuity and sympathy. The evening's performance is almost entirely Miss Russell, but there are excellent portrayals in the supporting roles. There should be a particular word for Polly Rowles as Mame's actress friend, Robert Smith's good-natured Southern husband, Joyce Lear's nitwit fiancee, young Jan Handzlik's little Patrick Dennis, Marian Winters' disagreeable Dixie belle, and Peggy Cass' pregnant secretary. "Auntie Mame" certainly establishes Miss Russell as a magnificent comedienne.

Journal-American

November 1, 1956

Tremendous Triumph by Roz Russell

By JOHN McCLAIN

"AUNTIE MAME" is a towering and tremendous hit. It exceeds advance notices from the road; it is better than the book from which it was adapted. The first night audience at the Broadhurst, where it opened last night and figures to remain indefinitely, spent a rigorous evening rocking with laughter and occasionally dabbing at their eyes.

For the Jerome Lawrence-Robert E. Lee version of Patrick Dennis's best-selling novel has added a strong element of "heart" to the original story, and Rosalind Russell, who here establishes some sort of record for fast changes and fresh entrances, exploits this element to the hilt. It took the season quite some time to bring us a bright new success, but it is worth waiting for.

The adapters have taken the story of a madcap aunt who is suddenly required to raise her orphaned nephew and skillfully telescoped the many incidents into a hilarious character study.

An Atmosphere of Pathos

They have also, as mentioned, contrived to inject an atmosphere of pathos into the proceedings which was not noticeable in the book. Auntie Mame is so utterly beguiling, generous and earnest in her mixed-up way that when she comes a cropper, and her little ward rushes stolidly to her side, the flutter of hankies can be heard in Sardi's bar.

How well this works is a commentary on the unusual talents of Miss Russell. It is always her show, and she is only absent for the brief interval required for somebody to slide a last zipper on the next of a series of resplendent costumes. She runs the full gamut, from Oriental, to crinoline, to horsey, to tweed—depending upon the mixed moods of the biography—but she is usually onstage, she is always in command, and in one of the rare experiences in theatrical history, she holds her own with a child actor.

Jan Handzlik, playing the lad foisted upon her by the sudden death of her brother, is a competent and assured young performer, but he knows he has been in a battle when he faces Miss Russell in front of the lights. Their scenes together are superlative, yet there is never a doubt about who's the star.

Fine Direction and Settings

In the large supporting company especial mention must be made of Beulah Garrick, Yuki Shimoda, Polly Rowles, Robert Smith, Marian Winters, Robert Higgins, Peggy Cass, James Monks, Joyce Lear and, again, young Handzlik.

The show is an overall triumph also for Morton DaCosta, who directed, and Oliver Smith, who managed to assemble a series of sets stretching from Beekman Place to a slope of the Swiss Alps. And there are, of course, those delicious gowns designed by Travis Banton for Miss Russell.

"Auntie Mame" is enormous and prententious, gaudy and flamboyant; it is Rosalind Russell at her best. As such it should last as long as she cares to play it.

"Major Barbara"

New York Post

October 31, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Fine Production of 'Major Barbara'

The remarkable thing about "Major Barbara" is that it isn't produced more often. For it is certainly one of Bernard Shaw's brightest, slyest, most provocatively outrageous and most timeless comedies. Nevertheless, seeing it last night at the Martin Beck Theater, in its first local revival in recent years, I could only be delighted that its sponsors had waited until such a splendid cast could be assembled for its wonderfully argumentative and cantankerous joys and Charles Laughton could both direct and play in it. The result is an event well worth the delay.

For a few minutes, I was a little worried. Not only does the brilliant Shavian debate take quite a while to get started, but there were dangerous signs that Mr. Laughton's staging was going to be a trifle coy and mannered. Happily, it wasn't too long before any such perils were forgotten, and, with the actor-director and Burgess Meredith handling its attacks and rebuttals in their finest style and with exhilarating relish, and Glynis Johns playing the title role of the embattled Salvation Army girl charmingly, it became clear that everything was in good order.

Devil's Advocate

One of the characteristically Shavian qualities of "Major Barbara" is the way it demonstrates that the author can be as entertaining and almost as persuasive when he is defending nonsense as when he is arguing on behalf of sounder causes. The perfect Devil's Advocate, he can make out a case for a ruthless manufacturer of munitions with as much diabolically convincing logic as he sets down his central figure's more sensible view that poverty is the greatest of crimes. Whatever side he takes, he presents it with a wit and gusto that are incomparable.

I suppose he has never created a more Shavian hero than this Andrew Undershaft, the munitions manufacturer who is also a sardonic social philosopher. No author has ever had a warmer regard for wealth and the wealthy than Shaw, the lifelong Socialist, and it is hardly one of his most engaging traits. Yet Undershaft, the cynical capitalist, is such a candidly witty creation that he is not only a fascinating figure but a curiously and perversely engaging one. Shaw gives him all the best of it in his arguments, and there's no doubt that he dominates the play.

The Antagonists

Mr. Laughton plays the role with as much relish as Shaw put into it, and the actor has an admirable way of making the speeches and characteristics of Undershaft seem truly his own. So powerful is the part that the manufacturer's opponents might appear very dim figures if they weren't well portrayed. Fortunately, Mr. Meredith offers one of his finest performances as his chief antagonist, the rebellious teacher of Greek, making him a foeman worthy of old Andrew's steel. And Miss Johns, as the baffled idealist, has a humorous charm that enables her to stand up gallantly in defeat.

There is an excellent characterization by Eli Wallach as Bill Walker, the ruffian who isn't quite converted, and Cornelia Otis Skinner, Nancy Malone, Colin Keith-Johnston, Frederic Warriner, Richard Lupino and Walter Burke manage comparatively small roles effectively. The settings have been handsomely devised by Donald Oenslager. "Major Barbara" is, in its sardonic viewpoint, as perverse, outrageous and provocatively cynical a comedy as Shaw ever wrote. In a word, it's completely Shavian. And, in this brilliant production, it's an argumentative delight.

"MAJOR BARBARA"

Play by George Bernard Shaw; staged by Charles Laughton; settings and lighting by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Dorothy Jeakins; presented by Robert L. Joseph and the Producers Theatre at the Martin Beck Theatre, October 30, 1956. The cast:

Morrison.....John Astin
Footman.....Frank Gero
Maid.....Louise Latham
Lady Britomart.....
Cornelia Otis Skinner
Stephen.....Frederic Warriner
Major Barbara.....Glynis Johns
Sarah.....Myra Carter
Adolphus Cusins..Burgess Meredith
Charles Lomax...Richard Lupino
Andrew Undershaft.....
Charles Laughton
Rummy Mitchens....Sally Gracie
Snobby Price.....Walter Burke
Jenny Hill.....Nancy Malone
Peter Shirley..Colin Keith-Johnston
Bill Walker.....Eli Wallach
Mrs. Baines.....Patricia Ripley

Daily Mirror

October 31, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Major Barbara' A Glorious Revival

• Charles Laughton heads star-studded cast at Martin Beck.

The most shameful of sins is poverty, argued G. B. Shaw in "Major Barbara" back in 1905. The cardinal virtues are freedom and prosperity. The master of paradox was astounding the socialists and reformers by saying something nice about capitalists.

His particular capitalist in this instance was a munitions manufacturer. His favorite daughter planned to wed a professor of Greek, and, together with him, save souls in the slums of London through the Salvation Army. And the cannon maker needed them to perpetuate his vast enterprise.

SO THE OLD Machiavelli, by way of proving that charities could only exist through the contributions of millionaries, donated 5,000 pounds to the army. Then he showed that he knew a thing or two about helping people by taking his prospective heirs on a tour through his model factory town.

Here, the houses were neat, the streets clean and the wages high. Here were temples for all faiths. Here was power for good, in the hands of the practical rather than the sentimental. In fact, the wily Andrew Undershaft even agreed that his future son-in-law might use it to wage war on war.

The critics of the time called "Major Barbara" talky. Which indeed it is. They contended that it wasn't a play, but found it highly amusing. As for the author, he was content to describe it as a "discussion." It shocked a lot of playgoers, and that pleased Shaw no end. It made them think more than a little, and that delighted the Irish gadfly immensely.

Robert L. Joseph and the Producers Theatre did the season a great service by reviving "Major Barbara" at the Martin Beck Tuesday evening. They gave it to us with a stellar cast, with clever settings by Donald Oenslager, in which locales are changed right before the eyes of the audience.

IN OUR BOOK, Charles Laughton spells theatre, for he has an enormous relish for it. He puts his heart into his business, and savors to the full every line he speaks. He isn't afraid of acting. His co-stars are Burgess Meredith, Glynis Johns, Eli Wallach and Cornelia Otis Skinner.

He also has as associates in the company Colin Keith-Johnston, Nancy Malone, Walter Burke, Richard Lupino and Frederic Warriner. All have the gusto for their roles that Laughton, doubling as director, evidently wanted them to. The result is an uneven performance. Styles are mixed. But the upshot is a glorious, star-studded vaudeville show.

It was like sitting in the Palace, with a group of gifted headliners taking turns on stage, doing their brightest tricks in a super-charade devised by a genius. With an intelligent afterpiece that brought them all into rapport for a triumphant finale. That put a finish, a polish, on a memorable evening's entertainment.

You needn't believe half of what Shaw has to say to enjoy it. We often wonder just how much he believed himself. But he was a fascinating juggler of ideas and words. He could keep a concept spinning giddily in air with the dexterity of a Bob Ripa creating amazing patterns with googly balls.

WE SHOULD BE grateful for the riches we are receiving this semester: The Old Vic at the Winter Garden in Shakespeare's "Richard II," "Romeo and Juliet" and "Macbeth"; Maurice Evans at the Plymouth in Shaw's "The Apple Cart," and now G.B.'s stimulating "Major Barbara" at the Martin Beck. Wonderful tonics for the Fabulous Invalid.

The New York Times
October 31, 1956

Theatre: 'Major Barbara'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Charles Laughton and Bernard Shaw are both brilliant people, one has to accommodate himself to the other at some point in the evening.

But the production of "Major Barbara," which opened at the Martin Beck last evening, is a draw. Neither author nor director defers to the other. Here is Shaw cascading away at high speed—undermining religion, turning morality upside down, deriding idealism, denouncing poverty as a crime, sanctifying wealth and power and, as usual, doing what he ought not to do with wit, lightness, mockery and dexterity.

And here is Mr. Laughton as the director—spacious and relaxed, guiding the course of the production with a loose rein, solid as a good burgher with a comfortable property at his disposal, a little pompous and condescending in places. Five years ago he dazzled the town with a swift and cunning version of "Don Juan in Hell," which was all Shavian in style and pace. But in "Major Barbara" he gives Shaw a heavy battle by opposing the glitter of artificial comedy with showmanship. Mr. Laughton and Shaw do not see eye to eye.

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As a theatre man, Mr. Laughton has audacity and imagination. Presumably, the original idea for Donald Oenslager's settings came from Mr. Laughton. It is an interesting scenic production—no curtain to begin with, a series of cubes that can be arranged in the shape of a living room by liveried stagehands, painted drops, a noisy, steamy impression of a cannon foundry, some flamboyant lighting effects.

Mr. Oenslager is not ordinarily a man of grandiose conceptions. Through skill and taste he has retained control of this one, which will look very impressive when it is detached from Shaw and displayed in a museum.

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Niggardly about nothing, Mr. Laughton has engaged a star-studded cast that includes Glynis Johns as the disillusioned Major Barbara, Cornelia Otis Skinner as a lady of little mind and great station, Burgess Meredith as the lyrical-Greek professor, Eli Wallach as the bully and Colin Keith-Johnston as the workingman turned out of work because of age. As Andrew Undershaft, a very Shavian, nimble-minded Mephistopheles, Mr. Laughton gives an imposing performance in a style of thoughtful deliberation.

But Mr. Wallach as the rebellious ruffian and Richard Lupino in the small part of a silly gentleman are the only actors who have assimilated the Shavian manner. Mr. Lupino's little popgun bursts of irrelevant comment are funny. And Mr. Wallach's shiftless belligerence and humorous sulking are funny, also. Both Mr. Lupino and Mr. Wallach play in a light style.

Most of the actors behave like well-bred ladies and gentlemen who have studied the craft of educating the public with serious homilies. This is not Shaw. It is not Laughton. It is a stand-off in which nobody wins.

New York Herald Tribune
October 31, 1956

THEATER

'Major Barbara'

By WALTER KERR

I am going to spend as much time as possible this morning talking about the virtues of "Major Barbara" at the Martin Beck—for a reason I shall mention later.

First off, the production plan that Donald Oenslager has devised for Charles Laughton's staging is simply stunning. As we come into the theater the curtain is up, revealing nothing more than a few geometric forms that might be industrial foundation blocks and might be the most modern furniture. Cornelia Otis Skinner sweeps in brightly, nods to the audience agreeably, and with a flick of her elegant hands causes a flurry of draperies and an enormous painting to descend from the heavens—not to mention the fact that several cooperative servants are hustling huge potted palms into place on the pilasters. A London sitting room of 1905—in a trice.

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So far, ingenious but familiar. Mr. Oenslager has more in mind. Since the second act of Bernard Shaw's play draws some very fashionable and high-minded souls into the bowels of the munitions industry, the transition must be made both physically and spiritually: the common foundations of these two worlds must be illuminated. As five handsomely dressed figures turn their backs on us to descend into the supposed Inferno, a brilliant red glare stabs them into silhouettes, fountains of steam gush heavenwards, and the cool, splendid steel of Andrew Undershaft's cannon-built city swells into view. It's not only a spectacular piece of theatrical legerdemain, it's a rich shaft of light thrown on the meaning of the play.

I might add that Mr. Oenslager has done two further wash-drawings—a charming and moneyed uptown archway in contrast to a forest of workers' homes—that gleam with the same charm and the same cutting intelligence.

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Secondly, the evening is awash in actors, first-rate actors. Charles Laughton is himself present, almost without makeup and relying on his blinking, beady eyes alone to provide steady and shattering punctuation. Mr. Laughton is not reveling in his more luscious opportunities this time out: he is on hand to speak tartly and soberly for the serious Shaw, and when he tells an improvident idealist "I wouldn't have your income for all your conscience" or when he vehemently asks whether any ardent moralist has ever "measured the bursting strain of a man and a temptation" he blisters the air around him. Shaw's attack on poverty, on do-gooders, on the material blights that stain a nation is beaten out with the blare of a Salvation Army drum.

Burgess Meredith, perhaps in even better form than Mr. Laughton, bows mockingly to this industrial colossus, sings out his accusation that "a father's love for a grown daughter is the most dangerous of all infatuations," and roars his challenging "Blow, Machiavelli, blow!" with a ferocity that is at once high-spirited, musical, and hearteningly defiant.

Cornelia Otis Skinner makes a splendid muddle of the evening's philosophical climax with her cool and gracious idiocy, Glynis Johns—here the Gibson girl of the Salvation Army—lowers her fetching eyelids and continues to see through everyone around her, Eli Wallach recoils in rich, oily horror from the prospect of a reformed bum's calling him 'brother,' and Richard Lupino, Nancy Malone, and Frederic Warriner add brisk and brittle little side-glances of their own.

Furthermore, "Major Barbara" digs into a major vein of Shaw's crackling, cantankerous thought, and it's high time we had another good look at it. Thus the virtues.

Why spend all this time on them? Because I found myself steadily and seriously disappointed with the production and I've been trying to talk myself around. I think it's no go. As director, Mr. Laughton has placed two burdens on the play. He has seen fit to use Mr. Oenslager's captivating stage pattern as a stage for a Punch and Judy show, with oddly stylized bobbings up and down, unprepared and unsuccessful addresses to the audience, coy and mannered posturings that look like nothing so much as a Vanity Fair cover for 1928. He has, in addition, paced his players at an even, unaccelerating, hushed and faintly hollow rate that finally seems to deny the possibility of real accent.

Most of all, though, I think he has lost the devil in Shaw—the practical imp, the prankster who arrives at seriousness through outrage, the playwright who is able to slip a knife into our sides as easily as though it had been buttered because he has kept us laughing so hard the while he was arming himself. This "Major Barbara" skirts laughter — big, solid laughter—in favor of Shaw the saint, Shaw the straightforward spokesman. But Shaw straightforward and Shaw solemn is a muted, an unconvincing Shaw; when the big wrap-up comes and we are invited to approve an all-out materialism based on munitions, we can do nothing but bridle. Because the antic oracle was being escorted into a conscious pulpit and read as head-on gospel, I found myself within inches—and for the very first time—of disliking the man.

Prodúction and players invite you into the house. It is odd, once inside, to find the host a bit chilly.

DAILY NEWS

October 31, 1956

Charles Laughton Has Inspired A Great Cast in 'Major Barbara'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As I was going up an aisle of the Martin Beck Theatre last evening at intermission I heard a man say to his lady, "God, what a play I could produce with a cast like that!" The poor fellow did not seem to realize that "what a play" had just run half its course within eyeshot and earshot of where he had been sitting. It was Bernard Shaw's "Major Barbara."

What a play indeed, and what a cast! Here is the theatre at its theatrical best—a perfect acting company in a superbly-wrought production of a comedy which is as new . . . and as frightening . . . as tomorrow. With the exception, perhaps, of the gentleman who yearned to find a play for this troupe of players, last evening's audience was alive with laughter and appreciation. And yet, such is the pertinence of this 51-year-old comedy, I felt that the audience was shuddering a little, too, and looking fearfully over its shoulder at the small shadow of a faraway new war.

G. B. S. Wins

The man I overheard probably wanted a play with a good firm plot and lots of love—and last night's cast might be perfectly terrible in it. But Shaw, of course, never wrote that way. "Major Barbara" is typical of Shaw and nobody else. It pelts you with jokes, jolts you with ideas, outrages you with opinions and pesters you with contradictions. Shaw, the brilliant and tricky fighter, is boxing with the human race, and he wins overwhelmingly on points.

In "Major Barbara," the antagonists are Andrew Undershaft, a cynical munitions tycoon "who never has a proper thought without giving an improper reason," and Adolphus Cusins, an idealist student of the Greek poets and philosophers. Caught in the middle is one of Andrew's daughters, Barbara, who believes that the way to the salvation of herself and of the world is for her to become a major in the Salvation Army. Barbara was a mission doll half a century before Sarah Brown turned up in "Guys and Dolls."

Superb Performances

Ever a one to talk himself, Shaw is willing to let many others have their say in "Major Barbara"—sheltered ladies, shoddy riffraff, the pathetically down-and-out, a professional do-gooder among them. They do their talking in a production which is remarkable for its fluidity and theatrical invention.

Major credit must go to Charles Laughton for the great style with which he has staged the comedy and the equal style with which he plays Undershaft. But there is not a man or woman on the stage who has not caught that style and Shaw's hellish humor as well.

All give superb, adroit, witty performances: Cornelia Otis Skinner as Laughton's estranged wife; Frederic Warriner as a prissy son who becomes a turning worm; Glynis Johns as the girl who concludes that there may be more salvation in wealth and might than in the Salvation Army; Myra Carter as her slender and slender-minded sister; Burgess Meredith as the brilliant devotee of Truth as the Greeks knew it, and Eli Wallach in a truly fabulous characterization of a cockney tough.

And there are others—Colin Keith-Johnston as an honorable down-and-outer, and Richard Lupino, Sally Gracie, Walter Burke, Nancy Malone and Patricia Ripley in other pithy roles.

Donald Oenslager's settings, simple but magnificent and witty, provide a perfect area in which director Laughton has worked out his mastery of a notable comedy.

Journal-American

October 31, 1956

Superb Cast In Eminent Production

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE ARE CERTAIN reservations from this sector concerning "Major Barbara," the star-studded Bernard Shaw offering which was presented at the Martin Beck last night. The old boy is garrulous, we are prepared for that, but it seemed to me that in this highly-confused moment in the world's meanderings his 1905 observations are something short of profound. I am an intrenched royalist, don't get me wrong, but I am still not quite prepared to go along with the theory that (and I quote) "there is no liberalism that money won't cure."

Having thus disposed of the play's ideology I hasten to add that this is easily the best production of Shaw we've seen around here in many a semester. There are two edges to this sword: there are the actors, and there is the most ingenious job of set designing since "No Time for Sergeants."

Staggering Array of Talent

In the first category we have the staggering array of Charles Laughton, Burgess Meredith, Glynis Johns, Eli Wallach and Cornelia Otis Skinner, to name only the principals. Mr. Laughton has staged as well as lent his talents to the role of Major Barbara's father, and he succeeds wonderfully well. Nobody could possibly express better the symbol of capitalism. could roll the profit in a balance sheet through his teeth with more relish than he. As director of the show, he has once again exhibited the technique (memories of "The Caine Mutiny") of holding the action in reverence to the spoken word. His players posture and form graceful and immobile groups while important dialogues are in progress.

Meredith, the rogue, has a happy evening in the part of the Greek scholar whose temporary preoccupation with the Salvation Army is less appealing than his desire for a full dinner pail. Glynis Johns is an enormously beguiling soul saver, with her cherubic face and bland delivery. Miss Skinner, handsome and dignified, pulls the proceedings together with her ability to deliver the verbal thrust at the propitious moment. There is some question about the casting of Eli Wallach as the unsaved soul but let's face it, it's a relief to find an American playing a British part these days.

Settings Rate High Praise

A major credit for the eminence of the production must go to Donald Oenslager, who did the settings. It is rarely that this part of an evening is so intrusive, but here it rates high praise.

His center stage as the curtain rises is occupied by a pile of high blocks. A large painting in the background and other minor appurtenances create the illusion that this is an Edwardian drawing room. Diaphanous curtains descend to take one from Mayfair to the London slum area, and when the drops go up the blocks are still there, always serving a purpose. At one point steam comes out of them to create the impression of a munitions factory. Seldom, if ever, has so little been so tastefully employed to look like so much.

It is most difficult to describe properly this contribution of Mr. Oenslager to the general success of the play, but certainly simplicity has something to do with it. This same thought may be applied to Mr. Shaw, the author. Things just aren't that simple any more.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

October 31, 1956

Laughton Opens a Bag Of Tricks and Treats

By TOM DONNELLY.

Charles Laughton's production of Shaw's "Major Barbara" (at the Martin Beck) is tricked up to a fare-thee'-well, rather dismayingly in the first part of the evening, and quite successfully in the second part.

At the start, the curtain is up, and the stage is occupied by some large gray rectangular shapes. Servants appear with potted palms and bright blue cushions, which they arrange upon the rectangles. Enter Cornelia Otis Skinner, nominally as Lady Britomart, but more convincingly as Cornelia Otis Skinner, that most attractive and affable of parlor entertainers. Miss Skinner makes a gesture to warn the audience that everything is not in place yet and, sure enough, a large gold-framed painting is lowered in the distance.

The stylized drawing room is now ready, and the reading of the play commences. "Major Barbara" is not under any circumstances a work pulsating with warm human relationships. Mr. Laughton has underscored everything that is arbitrary: belated family reunions are occasions for displays of verbal thrust and counter-thrust; a father immediately establishes himself as a symbol of enlightened Power, a daughter is presented as a symbol of dimly-lit Moral Superiority.

Whether in the drawing room, or in a Salvation Army post in the London slums, Mr. Laughton's actors are encouraged to disport themselves with the utmost artificiality. Major Barbara's sister is a figure right out of a satiric musical comedy reminiscence of the long ago. She is very amusing in her long tubular sack of a gown, and very jarring. When one of Major Barbara's young Salvation Army associates is assaulted by a ruffian, the business is executed as if Mr. Laughton were intent on bringing three-dimensional life to one of John Held Jr.'s woodcuts depicting melodramatic villainy in the Gay Nineties.

Does Miss Glynis Johns, in the title role, suggest that she is really passionately involved in the battle for men's souls? No, she is as above that battle as any Oscar Wilde ingenue. The larger speeches, when they occur, are so many stones dropped into so many separate pools. Calculation abounds, and emotional electricity is absent.

There is an exception to the above. Eli Wallach, as the slum rebel who is bullied by Major Barbara into an attack of conscience, is real and affecting. Mr. Wallach is not remotely cockney, but he has evolved a high spirited gargle that suffices handsomely.

Well, that's Part One. In Part Two, Mr. Laughton's methods and Mr. Shaw's matter fuse, and the production achieves its own peculiar lease on life. For now "Major Barbara" enters totally into the halls of debate. The actors arrange themselves in graceful attitudes and speak the witty and intricate lines with subtle shadings and resounding enthusiasm. All of them shine here: Miss Johns, Miss Skinner, Burgess Meredith as the Greek scholar who wins both the girl and her father's munitions factory, and Mr. Laughton. As a matter of fact, Mr. Laughton is consistently effective, even if his staging is not. His Andrew Undershaft, munitions maker, is from first to last a compelling if somewhat inhuman force, giving full value to the many glittering Shavian essays.

I must confess that "Major Barbara" is not my favorite item in the master's catalog. As a rule, Shaw entertains us by giving us six sides of every question. In "Major Barbara" the weight of the argument goes in a single chilling direction, towards the "reality and power" of a civilization "organized" by the "strong man" who knows what is good for the workers. Shaw is very right and very funny when he shows us the impossibility of an ultimate moral consistency. To shun all compromise in the world of affairs is to court lunacy. Andrew Undershaft's benevolent dictatorship is not the answer, however, not if you take it out of the controlled vacuum of "Major Barbara" and apply it to the universe Shaw did not make.

There IS a degree to which morality should be shortsighted and immediate, concerned with the bird in the hand. But it is a problem in aesthetics to find the degree, and the aesthetic area is, of course, Shaw's area of weakness. A man who could favor a bowl of spinach over a platter of rare roast beef is not to be followed blindly.

"Macbeth"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
October 30, 1956

THEATER

'Macbeth'

By WALTER KERR

FOR the moment in which Macbeth sees—a second time—the blood-spattered ghost of Banquo, Old Vic director Michael Benthall has arranged a bold and headlong bit of business. As the lights pick out the tattered shirt and bobbing head of Macbeth's unwelcome visitor, the Thane bolts to his feet, roars insanely over the benches on which his dinner guests sit, and, scattering guests and goblets and hung draperies, calls out to the spectre from a leonine stance astride the castle table.

* * *

The image is a royal and raging one, pictorially resplendent and dramatically vigorous. Still, there is something wrong with it. We see it being done, catch it in the act of maneuvering, notice separately the collapse of a wall hanging, the spread-eagle dive of a bit player being hurtled to the floor, the rhythmic advance of Macbeth himself. Between the thought and the act falls a shadow—the shadow of a conscious mind shaping a studied effect.

* * *

This curious conflict of intelligence and inhibition seems to me characteristic, in many ways, of the current "Macbeth" and the Old Vic season in general. In the title role, for instance, Paul Rogers is giving an intensely reasoned, firmly and bitterly patterned, utterly clear reading of his conscience-stricken usurper.

And Mr. Rogers seems to me easily the most promising member of the large, young, freshly-trained company from London. When he moves urgently to the edge of the slightly extended apron at the Winter Garden, his eyes flash ambitious fire, his epithets are spat out with demonic control. His impassioned outcry against the visions that are haunting him ("But no more sights!") cuts the gloomy air of this castle like a suddenly-drawn knife; the curled lip with which he acknowledges the "sere and yellow leaf" of his life is sobering in its candor.

Yet, like that vivid picture Mr. Benthall has so patiently painted for us, there is a failure of fusion, a refusal to swell into the ocean-roll of a climax, about Mr. Rogers' work. The passing phrase is always meaningful; but as the phrases pound forward to a crescendo in which man and emotion must meet in a fiery unity, the sense of separation—of voice and passion as elements that can be meted out deliberately—continues to cling. Mr. Rogers is never quite lost in the verse; neither are we.

* * *

As Lady Macbeth, Coral Browne is a handsome, stalking, sensuous goad to this man of two minds. But she, too, for all the cobra-like venom she helps distill, often seems more intent on the sighing sound of a phrase ("Hold, ho-o-o-o-ld!") than on the deep personal furies that set this tigress in motion.

Jack Gwillim's Banquo is a forceful streak of conscience in a guilty world, John Neville's Macduff is especially effective in the anguished passage in which he learns that his "pretty ones" are dead, and Jennifer Wilson is an appealing Lady Macduff. Richard Wordsworth's Porter is shrewdly amusing once that door has been got open, curiously muted and uncertain while the clamor is still at its height.

Because Mr. Rogers is a player worth watching, and because director Benthall has contrived to add some colorful and reveal-pantomime inserts, "Macbeth" strikes me as being the most interesting of the Old Vic productions to date. But the final power of genuinely stirring tragedy is still waiting in the wings.

"MACBETH"

Tragedy by William Shakespeare; staged by Michael Benthall; decor and costumes by Audrey Cruddas; presented by the Old Vic Trust Ltd. and the Arts Council of Great Britain under the management of Sol Hurok at the Winter Garden Theatre, October, 29, 1956. The cast:

Witches.....Richard Wordsworth, Wynne Clark, Job Stewart
Duncan.....Denis Holmes
Malcolm.....Jeremy Brett
Donalbain.....Peter Needham
Macduff.....John Neville
Lennox.....Charles Gray
A Sergeant.....John Woodvine
Ross.....Ernest Hare
Macbeth.....Paul Rogers
Banquo.....Jack Gwillim
Fleance.....Keith Taylor
Seyton.....Aubrey Morris
Lady Macbeth.....Coral Browne
A Doctor.....Edward Harvey
Murderers.....John Woodvine, Graeme Campbell
Lady Macduff....Jennifer Wilson

New York Post
October 30, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Old Vic Presents its 'Macbeth'

The Old Vic Company got around to "Macbeth" at the Winter Garden last night, and its production of Shakespeare's somber and gory drama had vigor, passion and a fine, outspoken directness. I don't think it was as brilliant a presentation as the visiting Londoners' stunning "Richard II," but it seemed to me far superior to their disappointing "Romeo and Juliet," and, with the talented and versatile Paul Rogers playing the title role with the skill we've already come to expect of him, the performance was a steadily absorbing one, and sometimes more than that.

It was the headlong, straightforward directness of Mr. Rogers' approach to the part of the murderous monarch that impressed me most. In the manner of the Old Vic Shakespeareans, he doesn't go in for much emphasis on the famous soliloquies, even though he does the "tomorrow and tomorrow" speech with freshness and eloquence. But he has an admirably unified conception of the character, which combines the villainy and the traces of humanity in the man, his homicidal ambitions and his uxorious devotion, with both dramatic power and complete credibility.

Usurper's Doom

The second half of "Macbeth," with the disintegration of the usurping monarch and the collapse of his fortunes, often seems in performance the weak section of the play, but it is here, I think, that Mr. Rogers is at his best. His usurper does disintegrate in mind and spirit, but he also, in some ironic sort of way, gains in stature as he comes to realize that destruction and death await him. At the end, with all of his cruelties and treacheries overwhelming him, he somehow achieves a size that transforms a monstrous scoundrel into an authentic figure of tragedy.

As usual with this Old Vic troupe, there are a number of excellent performances. Coral Browne is a striking and credible combination of ogress and woman as Lady Macbeth, and John Neville, back in form after his struggles with Romeo, is excellent as Macduff. Jack Gwillim, who is clearly one of the stalwarts of the company, is especially good as Banquo, and Denis Holmes' brief appearance as the slaughtered Duncan is effective and properly appealing. I was slightly disappointed by the able Richard Wordsworth's scene as the porter.

Value of Clarity

It is good to come upon a company of Shakespeareans who speak out clearly and vigorously, and this is certainly a virtue that the Old Vic offers in "Macbeth," just as it did in "Richard II." It is very rarely that even one of the minor speeches is slurred or one of the lesser actors fails to make himself entirely understandable. This in itself would put these British visitors in our good graces. Save for Mr. Rogers' performance, I can't believe there is anything brilliant in this production of one of the most famous of tragedies, but it has force and intelligibility.

I hope you won't think I am going in for cultural chauvinism when I remind you that the local off-Broadway group known as the Shakespearewrights last year gave us a production of "Macbeth" that had a wonderful melodramatic vigor second to no recent presentation of the tragedy that I've seen anywhere, and that the title role was played by an American actor named Pernell Roberts with remarkable power. The Old Vic version of the play is not that dynamic, but it has the skill and polish that show the value of England's Shakespearean tradition. And Mr. Rogers is notable.

The New York Times

October 30, 1956

The Theatre: 'Macbeth'

Paul Rogers Seen in Old Vic Production

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NOT having put on a new production since the two they mounted last week, the Old Vic actors performed "Macbeth" at the Winter Garden last evening.

Performed it well, moreover. For again it is obvious that the repertory system not only produces players but plays. Under Michael Benthall's direction, this is a savage, dour, turbulent "Macbeth" that does not dwell on scenes but tells a headlong story boldly. It does not shy away from the blood-letting and the horror.

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There is no particular "interpretation." The Old Vic players are not trying to prove anything except that an able and seemly man destroys himself with ambition, and a proud and merciless woman loses her reason under the weight of a fearful guilt. Paul Rogers, who acted a saucy Mercutio and a valiant John of Gaunt last week, plays Macbeth with craft, force and bluntness. An intelligent actor with a resonant voice, Mr. Rogers catches the whole range of the character from the mannerly though guarded beginning to the reckless brutality of the end.

Coral Browne's Lady Macbeth is an extraordinary piece of acting. On her first entrance, her Lady Macbeth is a sensual, baleful woman of grace and authority who sends a shudder through the whole play. But the evil of the story slowly drains the strength away. By the time of the sleep-walking scene, Miss Browne's Lady Macbeth is a worn, dishevelled, glassy-eyed creature who has tumbled over the brink into madness. As a piece of acting, this Lady Macbeth is the triumph of the performance.

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Audrey Cruddas' costumes ably convey the dark, rude obsession of the story. But it seems to this department that her settings are neither one thing nor the other. They lie somewhere between realism and abstraction, and represent the hopelessness of trying to think of Shakespeare in terms of the picture-frame stage. The excellent lighting is more inventive than the scenery.

On the whole, this is a traditional production. And that is not intended here as adverse comment on what Mr. Benthall has accomplished. For the traditional approach is stimulating when the director is resourceful and the players gifted. Mr. Benthall awakens the tumult contained in the drama by the roughness of his crowd scenes and by occasionally using the crowds as a dramatic chorus. When Macbeth reports that he has killed Duncan's grooms, the silent, suspicious movement of the crowd towards Macbeth is more specific than Shakespeare. Mr. Benthall is the sort of theatre man who knows how eloquent a pause or a moment of silence can be.

He can take pride in something else. Instead of intellectualizing "Macbeth," he has taken it on Shakespeare's level as a bloody tale of brutish people, primitive folklore and the vengeance of supernatural fate. It's a thrilling drama in those terms.

Journal American

October 30, 1956

Old Vic Group Performs a Brilliant Job

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE Old Vic Company, continuing their Shakespearean repertory at the Winter Garden, last night gave us an enormously charged-up production of "Macbeth," a brilliant evening of blood and witches potion, of sword play and sophistry, of bagpipes and the eerie echo of death on the moors.

This is a taut and remorseless tragedy, the most theatrically adaptable in the Bard's inventory, and I think our gifted friends from the Old Country have exploited it to the hilt.

The mood is the thing with "Macbeth." There must be a prevailing sense of violence plus a strong devotion to the supernatural. In this the Old Victors excel. The proceedings open to the roll of drum and the skirl of bagpipes; when a chap is done in he is bathed in blood (Banquo even wears a plastic item representing a cut throat), and the old hags cook their brew in a king-sized cauldron.

Intrigue and Revolt Rife

The stage is decked in royal tartan for the banquet scene; for the exteriors a thin blue spot plays fleetingly on the speakers. The premises are awake with intrigue and revolt.

I believe Paul Rogers is a great Macbeth. He doesn't depend on padding for power, and even his beards never get out of hand, if you'll pardon the illusion. But he has a strong voice, a commanding manner, and the ability to transmit the derangement which makes one wonder whether to pity or despise him. He possesses a wonderful thing called authority.

As his wife, Coral Browne steers a careful middle track. She is neither the relentless shrew, urging her mixed-up spouse into his depredations, nor is she the faltering victim of his ambition. She is a handsome and quite well-adjusted woman who realizes too late that pops has blown a gasket. She doesn't rant, and when she comes at last to the moment of truth, it is done with gentle sincerity.

Rest of Cast Well Chosen

The remainder of the cast has been skilfully assigned. Jeremy Brett is an engaging son to Duncan, the unhappy and temporary King of Scotland; John Neville is a young but no less forceful Macduff; Jack Gwillim is not only the bloodiest but also the most attractive Banquo in recent history; and there are excellent supporting performances by the three witches, by Keith Taylor, Jennifer Wilson, Aubrey Morris and Margaret Courtenay.

Michael Benthall directed this one, and I think he should probably be credited with the thoughtful fervor that comes across the lights.

It must also be recorded the sets and costumes of Audrey Cruddas are the most imaginative of the series and that Brian Easdale's music goes a long way toward building the dour Scottish atmosphere.

Go to see "Macbeth." I'll guarantee it's the only place in town where you'll see a dinner served on a goat-skin tablecloth.

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

October 30, 1956

Old Vic's Exciting Lady Macbeth

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Even a moderately gifted actress can scarcely fail to score as Lady Macbeth, for here is the strongest female role in Shakespeare. When a really good one gets into the part she can provide most of the excitement in this darksome melodrama—the Old Vic Company's Coral Browne was a really good one last evening at the Winter Garden.

Miss Browne is a handsome woman of regal stature, with a voice of extraordinary depth and power. She plays Lady Macbeth for all this ferocious woman is worth—but always she has the good sense or instinct not to try for more. Where a less intelligent woman with Miss Browne's physical and vocal attributes might be tempted to cut loose in the sleep-walking scene, Miss Browne plays this interlude with touching restraint, which makes her most effective theatrically.

Buckets of Blood

The rest of the Old Vic's "Macbeth" is not so steadily on the beam. The physical production is a stunning one, with the costumes and sets by Audrey Cruddas presaging murky deeds. And from the opening line, "What bloody mess is that?," there is plenty of blood—not only from the original stabbings but also from the murder of Lady Macduff and her children.

There are many interesting directorial and scenic conceits, such as director Michael Benthall's calling for the whole parade of Banquo's ghosts to be seen, and the setting for the final interview between Macbeth and the witches. These three ladies (played by two men and one woman) do their cooking over an absolutely monumental cauldron, preparing a mulligan of venom whose quantity would have astounded Shakespeare.

Macbeth Uneven

Paul Rogers' Macbeth was uneven in its effect upon me; he was holding in the crucial first moments of the drama, not quite so effective in his bout with Banquo's ghosts, extremely effective and quite individual in his delivery of the "tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech and rather at a loss upon discovering that the Birnam wood has moved to Dunsinane. However, his part of the death duel with Macduff was a rousing bit of hard-breathing swordplay.

However, John Neville just isn't the boy to play the vengeful Macduff . . . because it isn't a boy's part. There is an excellent, glowering menacing performance by Aubrey Morris as Seyton, and a good robust on by Jack Gwillim as Banquo.

I've seen better "Macbeths," but never a better Lady Macbeth.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

October 30, 1956

Macbeth Brings Home the Bacon

By TOM DONNELLY.

"Macbeth" is my idea of the indestructible melodrama. I've never sampled a "Macbeth" that didn't provide stimulating entertainment on one level or another. It was exciting with Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson; it was hilarious with Flora Robson and Michael Redgrave; it was bizarre on celluloid with Orson Welles, and I have seen it given a rousing rendition by assorted collegiate groups.

The Old Vic Companys' version, at the Winter Garden, also has its peculiar fascinations. This one is loud, broad, and strongly contemporary. The inflection is British, naturally, but the thematic tonal quality is American to an astonishing degree. Last night, I was constantly reminded of best-selling novels, films, and television dramas about the awful struggle for power in the modern commercial world, with the inevitable moral conclusion that the man who wins the race invariably winds up with a heap of dross, in the shape of a gaudy penthouse tenanted by the ghosts of good friends slain in the upward climb.

Gray Flannel Suits?

The Lord and Lady Macbeth of Paul Rogers and Coral Browne wouldn't be a bit out of place in Madison Avenue and Scarsdale. (Or at least not in the Madison Avenue and Scarsdale we have had constructed for us by our popular authors.) This Lady Macbeth is a handsome, willful creature, stylishly appareled, greedy for the expensive prizes of life, and terribly annoyed that her legal partner is hesitant about attempting the somewhat distasteful things a man must do if he doesn't want to get left behind in the great race.

Her mate is at first inclined to settle for the glories immediately at hand, but he soon allows himself to be spurred on by the scorn of his bride, who is a constant example to him of the stuff really big-time executives are made of. He leaps into the fray, gouging, kicking and scheming, and, sure enough, he makes it to the top. Well, we all know what he finds there.

This is one way of playing "Macbeth," and it makes for a sufficiently lively show. I don't for a moment maintain that the Old Vic actors set out to achieve the effect above described. They were undoubtedly aiming at a "Macbeth" of a dark red majesty, an awsome study of titanic ambitions realized at dreadful cost, at, in short, a straight Shakespearean reading of burning tragic intensity. They have not come close to any such ideal.

None Extraordinary.

The Old Vic troupe has now offered us three productions, and, whereas all of them have had their commendable aspects, none has been in any way extraordinary. The actors work together harmoniously, but always in a minor key. The over-all conceptions are lack- are no compensating bursts of individual reckless daring.

Certainly, Mr. Rogers and Miss Browne do not go after the bold effect. They manage this passage or that efficiently enough, but neither builds to any accumulated power. Miss Browne is a shrewd, lustful charmer in the early scenes, making it abundantly convincing that a man might enjoy being twisted around her little finger. When she arrives at the sleep-walking scene, she seems to be following the suggestion of Madame Pushkin, the eccentric dramatic coach, who advised her pupils to look for the Little Eva side of Lady Macbeth.

Mr. Rogers does the "Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow" speech with brilliant feeling; it is an isolated moment in a less than king-size interpretation.

Jack Gwillim is thoroughly up to the mark as Banquo, and John Neville, who has not exactly overwhelmed me as Romeo and as Richard II, gives a good account of himself as Macduff.